Hamilton Township Board of Education
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Academic

#2

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TESTIMONY

OF

ANGELA BELMONT

Professional Licensure and Standards Code
N.J.A.C. 6A:9

New Jersey State Board of Education
May 16, 2007

Good afternoon. My name is Angela Belmont and I am the Vice Principal of Grice Middle School in Hamilton Township. Before obtaining my current position, I served as a Curriculum Supervisor for seven years and taught High School Business Education for 19 years in Hamilton Township.

I understand that the State Board of Education is currently reviewing the Professional Licensure and Standards Code. Allow me to take this opportunity to share with you my experience in becoming a school leader and urge your continued focus on increasing the quality of our educational leadership programs.

In 1998, after having been a curriculum supervisor for seven years, I was ready to advance my career. Going back to school for a second master's degree in School Administration would have been very costly and, as a part-time student, probably taken five to six years. My experience as a curriculum supervisor exposed me to the ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards, curriculum development and implementation, district goals and philosophies, school board politics, facilitating in-service staff development, budget preparation and other responsibilities mirrored by a building administrator. It seemed like a logical progression for me to pursue a principal certificate and to transfer my skills and knowledge from curriculum to educational leadership in an elementary, middle, or high school building.

Fortunately, in 2002, the State approved a policy of pursuing multiple pathways to school leadership positions. Finally, there was an option for someone in my situation—a non-traditional principal preparation program—in this case, NJ EXCEL. I was a candidate in the very first EXCEL cohort. Completion of this non-traditional program allowed me to

apply for, and receive, my School Administrator Certificate of Eligibility as well as a Principal Certificate of Eligibility. Without this non-traditional option, it would have been extremely difficult for me to pursue an educational leadership role. In fact, I might still be studying today.

However, it was more than just mere convenience that made this program so valuable. I benefited from the program's structure of combining research-based strategies with highly qualified administrators who effectively model and implement the strategies on a day-to-day basis.

Clinical experiences and internships were by far the best part of my program experience. I met with other students in groups of eight to ten candidates with a mentor who guided our learning and allowed us to explore in depth the topics discussed in class. Clinical experiences were facilitated by principals currently working in educational administration. These principals were trained in rigorous methodology and followed specific criteria to provide experiences in staff development, strategic management, community involvement, and data-driven decision, among others.

Furthermore, the scope and sequence of instructional modules provided me a comprehensive summary of current educational issues, standards, and strategies that a principal must employ to meet the demands as an educational leader in New Jersey's schools.

I could spend an entire afternoon discussing the other critical elements of a school leader preparation program. However, for the purposes of your review, I urge you to work to preserve the quality and availability of high-quality preparation programs. From my experience, there are many aspiring school leaders who face the situation I did almost a decade ago—motivated to take a leadership role in the school, but unable to follow a traditional path to get there. We should ensure that these pathways remain open.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.